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ABSTRACT

This article reports the findings of a library user satisfaction survey of graduate students conducted by the library staff at South Carolina State University. The survey evaluated the effectiveness of the library's programs, resources, and services in meeting the informational needs of graduate students at this institution. The objectives of the survey were to: (1) identify the gender and category of the library user; (2) determine how often graduate students used the library; (3) evaluate the effectiveness of the resources and services available in the library; (4) determine the appropriateness of the library hours; and (5) identify the most and the least used services and resources. Results reveal that although most graduate students are satisfied with the resources and services provided, there is still need for up-to-date materials, more journals, and more computers to expand access to the Internet and other services. (AEF)

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Graduate Students Library Satisfaction Survey: Miller F. Whittaker Library South Carolina State University

By

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And

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Abstract

This article reports the findings of a library user satisfaction survey of graduate students conducted by the library staff at South Carolina State University. The survey sought to evaluate the effectiveness of the library's programs, resources, and services in meeting the informational needs of graduate students at this institution. The results of the survey reveal that although most graduate students are satisfied with the resources and services provided, there is still need for up-to-date materials, more journals, and more computers to expand access to the Internet and other services.

Introduction

One of the greatest challenges facing academic libraries today is meeting the users' needs. The staff at the Miller F. Whittaker Library, South Carolina State University,[1] conducted a user survey of Masters, Education Specialists, and Doctorate students on Saturday, November 8, 1997. The questions were related to the programs and services of the library.

The objectives of the survey were to:

1. Identify the gender and category of the library user
2. Determine how often graduate students used the library
3. Evaluate the effectiveness of the resources and services available in the library
4. Determine the appropriateness of the library hours
5. Identify the most and the least used services and resources.

In order to keep abreast with the needs of users, the library has conducted surveys from time to time.[2] The results from these surveys have led to changes and improvements addressing the needs and concerns of the users. In 1987, for example, a user survey was conducted.[3] Based on the results of that survey, Reference Desk schedules were changed to accommodate the time period users indicated they frequented the library. Users also identified collection areas where resources were limited. The majority of the respondents expressed satisfaction with the services that the library provided.

In 1993, the library staff conducted another user survey[4]. Contrary to the opinion held by some in the profession that academic libraries rarely use their surveys to initiate any changes in response to the findings,[5] based on that survey the library hours were extended from 10 p.m. to midnight, Monday through Thursday. Monitors were hired to control noise in the library. Requested books are being added to the library frequently and materials not available in the library are requested through interlibrary loan.

Literature Review

A review of the literature indicates that many libraries continue to conduct user satisfaction surveys to identify needed resources and services.[6] Most recently, Audrey Bancroft and others published the findings of the user survey conducted at Washington State University. The primary goal of their survey was to determine user requirements and expectations. From the survey they were able to determine user expectations such as improved journal holdings, and the preference of for "on-demand" instruction to scheduled instruction. The survey also served the purpose of educating users about available services and resources, encourage faculty and student interest in library issues, and document the needs of the library.[7]

To provide a better understanding of the specific needs of library users, libraries have to become more user focused. Recent research in this area points to the importance of incorporating users' personal needs and expectations into the development of programs and service, that only customers justify the existence of a library, and that the success of a library depends on the user as the judge of quality.[8] To implement this user-based service approach to measuring quality, libraries are turning to methods that define user expectations from the users' rather than the librarians' point of view.[9] Some libraries are also employing the services of marketing firms to help them understand what their users want.[10] And with the proliferation of library home pages on the World Wide Web, user surveys are not an unusual component of library web sites. Some surveys are detailed[11] while others may be simple "How are we doing?" forms.[12]

Most of these surveys focus on the entire academic population, while a few are targeted to specific service areas such as Interlibrary Loan, or groups such as faculty or graduate students. An examination of the available literature found that surveys targeted specifically to graduate students were few, while a further examination of standard professional indexes such as Library Literature, failed to find any report on user surveys conducted by a library at a Historically Black College or University.

This survey sought to address the needs of graduate students at South Carolina State University, and solicit their opinion towards the usefulness of the resources and services available to them. The information provided will be used to evaluate the effectiveness of the library's programs, resources and services in meeting the informational needs of these students.

Methodology

On Saturday, November 8, 1997, a four-page questionnaire consisting of sixteen questions was given to Masters, Education Specialists and Doctorate students. The instructor gave the survey to each student in class. The questionnaires were hand delivered to faculty members with a cover letter explaining what was required. After completion the survey was collected and delivered to the librarian.

A total of 84 out of 91 students responded to the survey. Demographic information indicated that of the 84 students who responded to the survey, 80% were female while 20% were male, 49% were in the Masters program, 24% Education Specialists, and 27% Doctorate.

Results

How often the Library is Utilized

One of the objectives of the survey was to determine how often graduate students used the library. The results show that 37% of the respondents utilized the library at least once a week, 33% utilized the library once a semester or less, 12% utilized the library once a month, and only 7% indicated they utilized the library daily. These results were not broken down by category, i.e. Masters, specialist, Doctorate, male or female.

Satisfaction with Library Services

The main purpose of this survey was to evaluate the effectiveness of the library resources and services to graduate students. The respondents were asked to evaluate the various library services such as hours of operation, borrowing/returning books, finding materials in the collection, the Online Catalog, CD-ROM

databases, periodicals, and interlibrary loan, and answers to reference questions, among others.

The respondents ' rate of satisfaction was measured on a scale of 1-5, with 1 being very dissatisfied and 5 being very satisfied. Those who did not use the services selected "0". For this report, "very dissatisfied" and "dissatisfied" were combined and reported as "dissatisfied", "satisfied" and "very satisfied" were combined and reported as "satisfied", while "somewhat satisfied" remained the same.

Overall, the results revealed that graduate students were generally satisfied with the various library services (see Fig. 1a). About 20% did not use the services (see Fig. 1b), but of those who used the services, 41% reported they were satisfied, 38% were somewhat satisfied, and 21% were dissatisfied.

Masters students were the most satisfied with the various library services. Overall, 51% of the Masters students were satisfied, compared to 41% of the Doctorate students, and 27% of the Education Specialists who indicated they were satisfied.

Overall, men appear to be more satisfied (48%) with the library services than women (42%). But in both groups the percentage of those who were somewhat satisfied and dissatisfied was about the same.

Borrowing and Returning Books

Borrowing and returning books received one of the most favorable ratings. The results show that a majority of the respondents (72%) were satisfied with Borrowing/Returning Books, while 17% were somewhat satisfied and only 12% reported being dissatisfied.

The Masters students were the most satisfied with borrowing and returning books. In total, 81% reported being satisfied, and 19% said they were somewhat satisfied. None reported being dissatisfied with this service. Among the Education Specialists 71% reported they were satisfied.

On the other hand, 31% of the Doctorate students expressed dissatisfaction with Borrowing/Returning books. This was quite high given that only 7% of the Education Specialists, and none of the Masters were

Fig. 1a

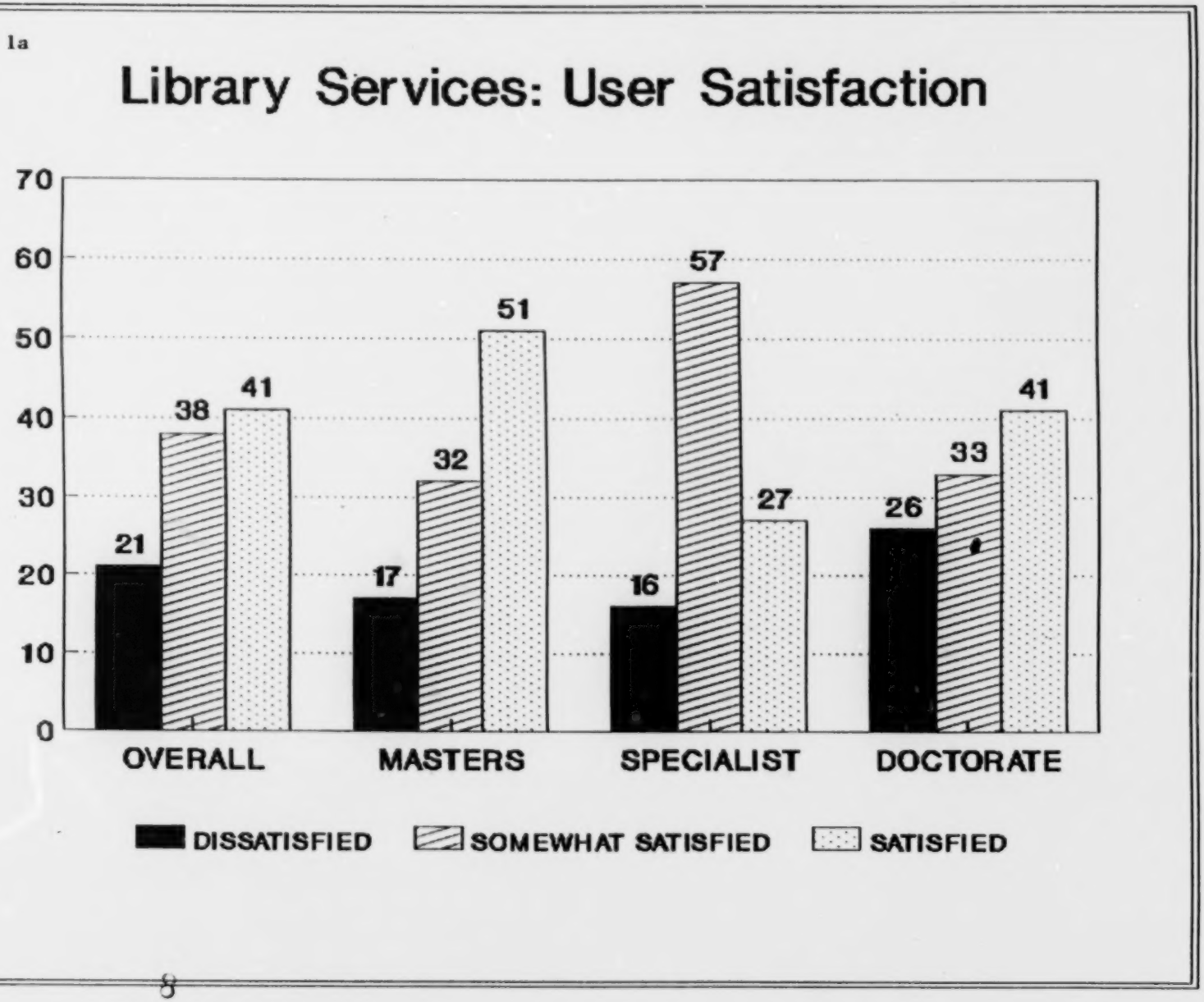
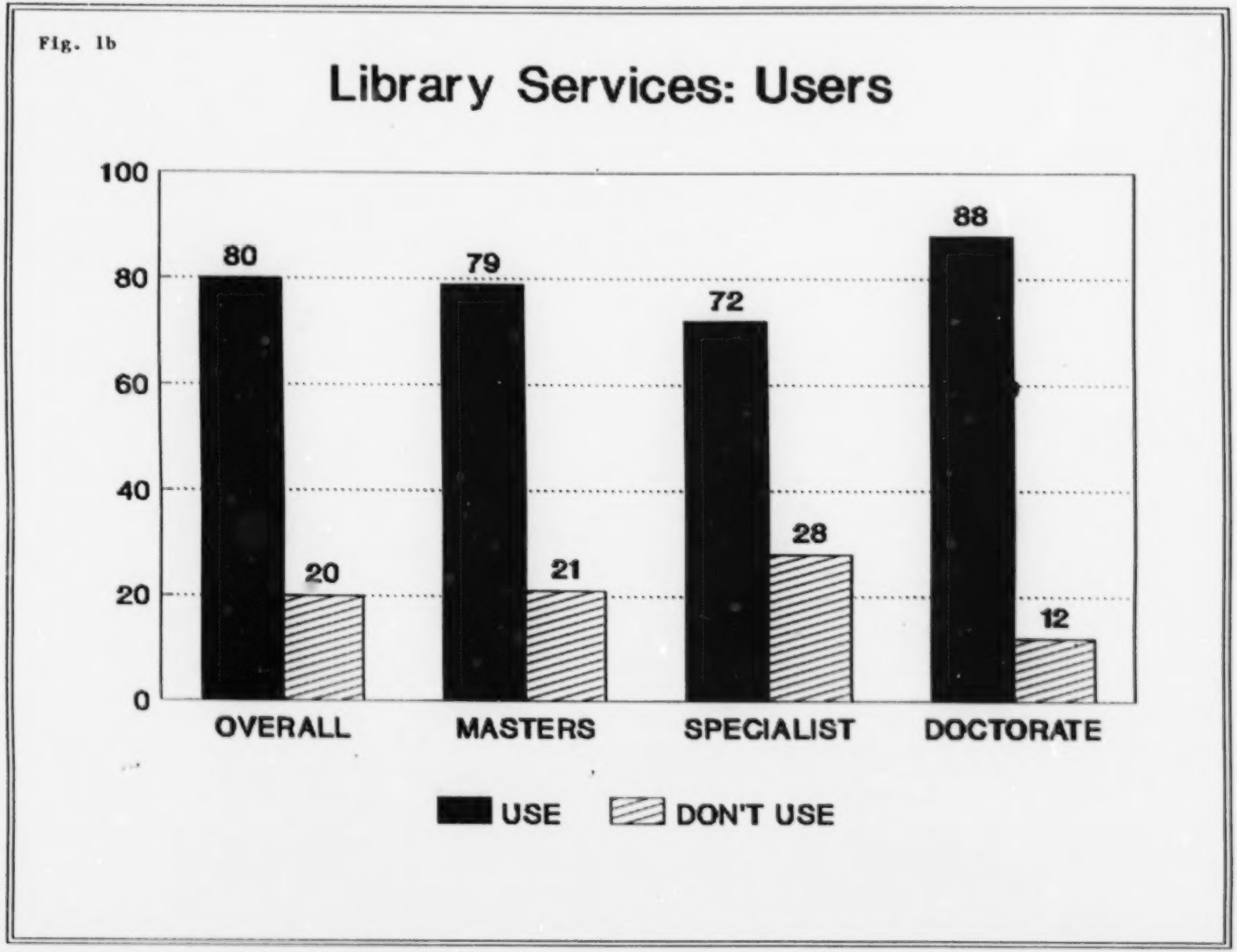

Library Services: User Satisfaction
70
60
50
40
30
20
10
0
21
38
41
17
32
51
16
57
27
26
33
41
OVERALL
MASTERS
SPECIALIST
DOCTORATE
DISSATISFIED
SOMEWHAT SATISFIED
SATISFIED

Fig. 1b


Library Services: Users
100
80
60
40
20
0
80
20
79
21
72
28
88
12
OVERALL
MASTERS
SPECIALIST
DOCTORATE
USE
DON'T USE

dissatisfied.

Library Hours

Compared to all other library services listed in the survey, library hours received the least favorable rating. Even though 45% of the respondents stated they were satisfied with the hours, 32% were dissatisfied, the highest percentage of dissatisfaction among all the services. These results agree with those of the question asked directly "Are you satisfied with the current library hours?" To this question 56% stated they were not satisfied with the hours, indicating that more than half of the respondents were dissatisfied.

In analyzing the results, the Doctorate students (59%) showed the highest dissatisfaction with the library hours. This was high considering that only 10% of the Masters students, and 30% of the Education Specialists were dissatisfied. However, a majority of Education Specialists (40%), reported they were somewhat satisfied, showing that they were not really satisfied with the hours. Masters students showed the highest level of satisfaction with the library hours, with 60% reporting they were satisfied.

Dissatisfaction with the library hours also featured highly when the respondents were asked in a free-form question if there were times when they wanted to use the facilities but they were not available. A majority, (77%) of those who gave comments were concerned with the hours and wanted the library to be open longer on weekends and Friday evenings.

Finding Materials in the Collection

Finding materials in the collection is an area that usually presents problems to a majority of users. Among the services surveyed, this was the second least favored area, with 28% of the respondents reporting they were dissatisfied.

The Doctorate students were the most dissatisfied with this service. Thirty five percent indicated they dissatisfied. The Education Specialists were not very satisfied either - 50% indicated they were somewhat

satisfied. The Masters students were the most satisfied, with 38% stating they were satisfied, and another 37% reporting to be somewhat satisfied. However, it is interesting to note that when users were asked directly "How often are you unable to find the materials you need in the library?" a majority, (54%) said infrequently, and only 8% said frequently, and 37% said never.

To find out exactly why users were unable to find the materials they needed in the library, respondents were asked to rank how frequently they were unable to find materials from the following list: "The library does not own the material. The material is checked out. The material is not where it is supposed to be. The material has been mutilated or vandalized. I did not ask for assistance."

To this question, most of the respondents (36%) reported that frequently it was because the library did not own the material. Doctorate students (53%), and Masters students (36%), ranked this as the main reason why they could not find the materials they need in the library. For the Education Specialists, the material not being where it is supposed to be was given as the main reason for not finding what they needed.

When asked "what source, other than the library, do you use to obtain information?" the overall responses were: 53% used departmental resources, 71% used a non-SCSU academic library, 79% used a public library, 24% used a special library, and 6% used other sources. A majority of the Doctorate students (90%) used a non-SCSU academic library, while 78% used a public library. Eighty-eight percent of the Specialist students used a public library, and 71% used departmental resources or a non-SCSU academic library. More Masters students (30%) used a public library, 58% used departmental resources, and 56% used a non-SCSU academic library. More females (74%) used a public library, while more males (75%) used departmental resources.

Periodicals

Satisfaction with periodicals received one of the lowest ratings, with 25% of the respondents stating they were dissatisfied with periodicals. Only 36% of the respondents stated they were satisfied, while 39% were

somewhat satisfied.

The Doctorate students (48%) were the least satisfied with periodicals. This percentage is high, compared to 13% of both the Masters students and the Specialists who indicated they were dissatisfied.

However, most of the Education Specialists (67%), selected somewhat satisfied, and only 20% stated they were satisfied, suggesting they were also not quite happy with periodicals.

The Masters students seem to be the most satisfied with periodicals. Fifty percent indicated they were satisfied with the periodicals, and only 13% said they were dissatisfied.

Utilization of Library Services

Another objective of this survey was to identify the most and least used services, and which category of students used which services most. This would assist the library in determining which services were most needed by the graduate students, and which ones they could utilize more.

According to these results, Doctorate students (88%) utilized library services the most, while the Education Specialists (72%) utilized library services the least.

Study Space was very highly utilized. In total, 89% of the respondents indicated they used this service, with Doctorate students (95%) reporting the highest usage. Masters students (92%) used the library for studying almost as much as Doctorate students, while Education Specialists (81%) reported the lowest usage.

There was only a slight difference in library use for studying between males and females. Of the respondents, 13% of the males indicated they did not use the library for studying compared to 10% of the females. Other services with high usage levels among all the respondents were Reference Books used by 88%) of the respondents, Periodicals used by 86% of the respondents, and Photocopiers used by 85% of the respondents.

Government documents and Special Collections were the least used services. In both areas, 30% of the

respondents indicated they did not use these services. Other less used services were Reserve Reading (29%), Interlibrary Loan (29%), and Dissertation Abstracts (27%).

Adequacy of Library's Collections

The survey also sought to evaluate the adequacy of the various library collections in meeting the needs of the graduate students. The collections included Journals and Magazines, Books, Electronic Information Sources (CD-ROMs), Indexes, Newspapers, Archives and Manuscript collections, and other printed materials such as microforms, government documents, and technical reports.

For this question, respondents were asked to rate their satisfaction on a scale of 1-4, with 1 being very dissatisfied, and 4 being very satisfied. Somewhat satisfied was not included as one of the choices. Those who did not use the services were asked to select "0-Don't Use". In reporting the results, "very dissatisfied" and "dissatisfied" were combined and reported as "dissatisfied", and "satisfied" and "very satisfied" were combined and reported as "satisfied".

Overall, those who were satisfied were more than those who were dissatisfied (see Fig. 2a). Of those who used the collections, 73% reported they were satisfied, while 27% were dissatisfied. Doctorate students (82%) appeared to be most satisfied.

Usage of the collections was also high (see Fig. 2b). In total, 72% of the respondents indicated they used the various collections. Doctorate students appear to be the highest users, with only 12% reporting they did not use the various collections compared to 33% of the Education Specialists, and 27% of the Masters students that reported lack of usage. Twice as many female students (28%) did not use the various collections compared to 14% of the males.

In assessing the adequacy of the library's collection of journal and magazines for their work, Masters students (81%) appear to be the most satisfied, compared to 70% of the Education Specialists and 69% of the

Fig. 2a

Library Collections: User Satisfaction

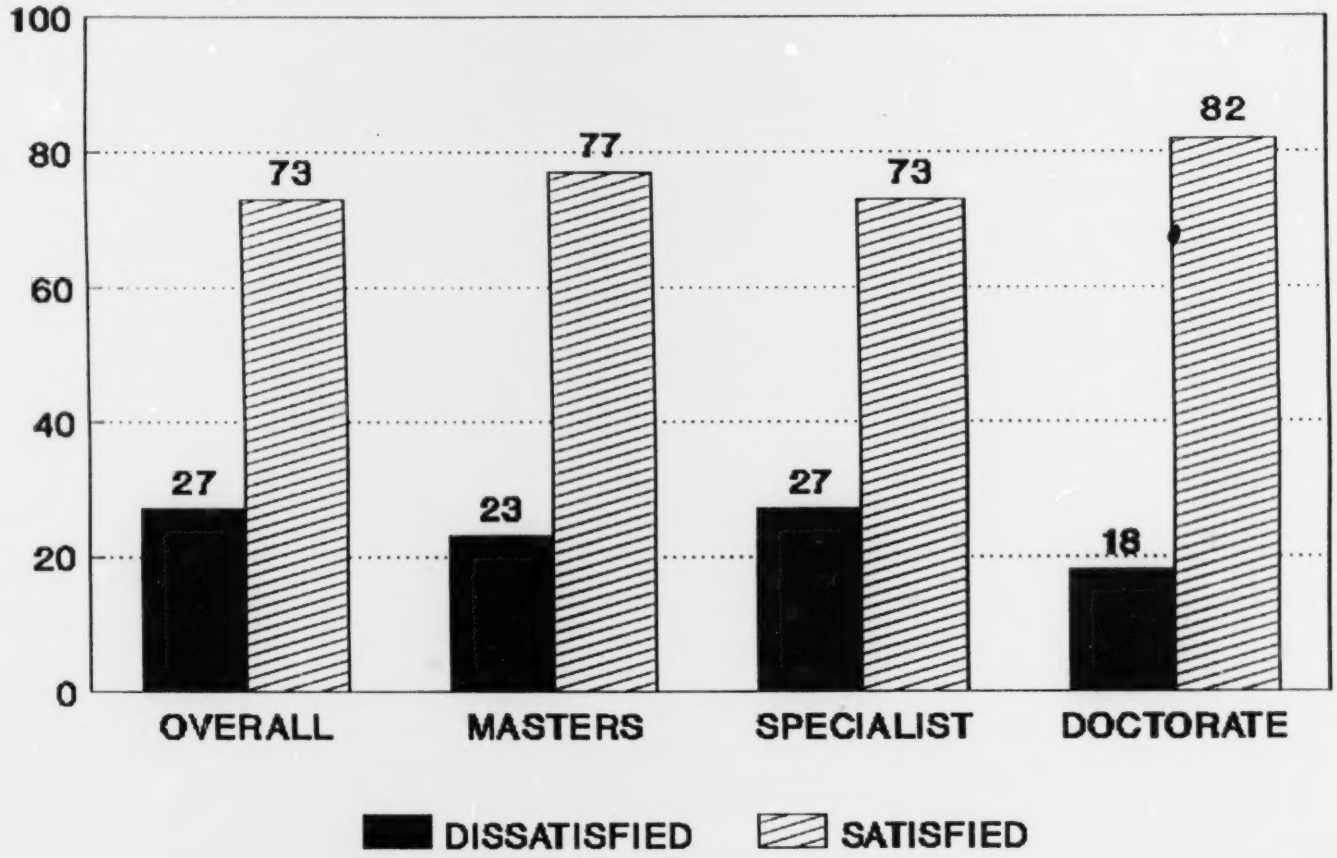
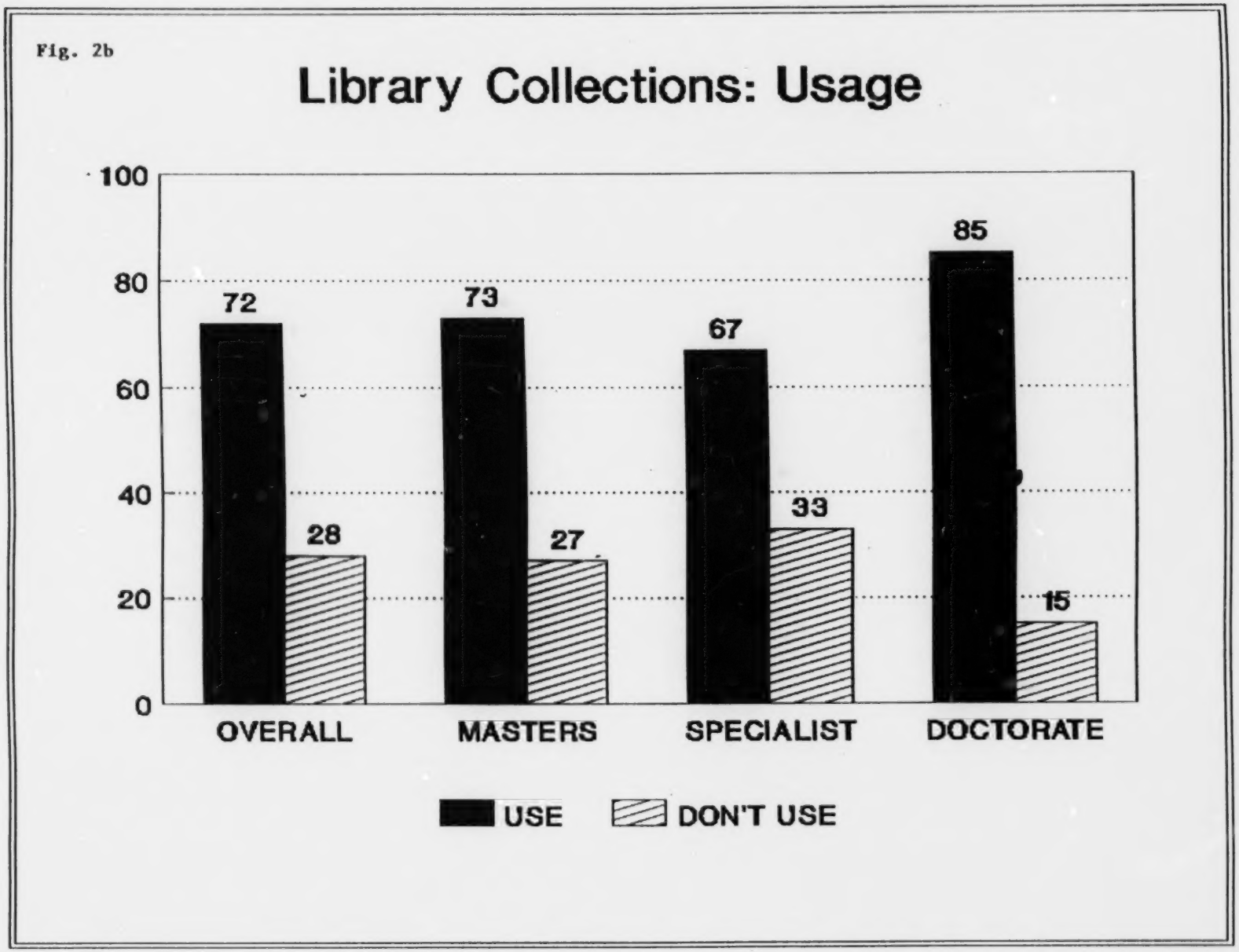


Fig. 2b


Library Collections: Usage
100
80
60
40
20
0
72
28
73
27
67
33
85
15
OVERALL
MASTERS
SPECIALIST
DOCTORATE
USE
DON'T USE

Doctorate students who indicated they were satisfied.

Overall, books received a positive rating. Seventy three percent of the respondents indicated they were satisfied with the library's book collection. Masters students were the most satisfied with the books, 77% stated they were satisfied, compared to 75% of the specialists and 68% of the Doctorates who said they were satisfied.

A majority of the respondents (81%) were satisfied with electronic information sources. The Doctorate students (93%) were most satisfied. This went hand in hand with a high usage rate of 83% among this group. The Masters students (75%) and the Education Specialists (81%) also reported high satisfaction rates.

The results also show that the graduate students heavily use indexes. Overall, 75% of the respondents indicated they used printed indexes, with the Doctorate students reporting 82% usage, Masters students 74% usage, and the Education Specialists 69% usage.

Satisfaction with indexes was quite high, especially among the Doctorate students who reported 100% satisfaction. The Education Specialists reported 82% satisfaction.

The highest positive rating amongst the various collections was the adequacy of the newspaper collection. This category received an 85% positive response from the respondents. The Doctorate students reported the highest satisfaction (94%), while 83% of the Masters, and 73% of the Specialists said they were satisfied.

The materials listed included Microforms, Government Documents, and Technical Reports. These materials reported low usage levels, compared to the other collections.

Despite the low usage, 80% of the Masters students who used these materials said they were satisfied, followed by the Doctorate students (69%). The Education Specialists were the most dissatisfied (40%), and also used this collection least.

However, Archives and Manuscripts are the least used according to this survey. Thirty nine percent of the respondents indicated they did not use Archives and Manuscripts. Doctorate students (63%) used this collection the most, and were also the most satisfied.

Quality of Services

Providing quality services is one of the goals the library strives to achieve. Respondents were asked to rate the quality of the effort made by the staff in the Reference, Interlibrary Loan, and Circulation service areas to accommodate their needs. The rating scale ranged from 1-5 with 1 representing a poor rating and 5 representing an excellent rating. Those who did not use the services, or had no opinion selected 0. In reporting the results in this category, "poor" and "fair" were combined and reported as "poor". "Good", "very good", and "excellent" were combined and reported as "good".

For all the three service areas listed, the results show that a large percentage of graduate students (25%) do not use these services. But most of those who used the services gave positive ratings: 64% stated the services were good, while 36% rated the services as poor.

According to these results, Reference was used most often compared to Circulation and Interlibrary Loan, and was also rated most positively. Reference received a positive rating from 71% of the respondents, compared to Interlibrary Loan, 61% positive, and Circulation, 60% positive.

The highest approval of Reference services came from the Doctorate students, with 80% of them stating they received good services. This rating corresponds with this group's high usage rate, since 95% of them reported they used Reference services. These results corroborate those of an earlier question where the respondents were asked to rate their satisfaction with answers to reference questions. In this case also, the Doctorate students (91%) were the highest users, and gave a high positive rating of 60% satisfaction, and 20% of them stating they were somehow satisfied.

Compared to the other groups, Masters students used Reference services least. Twenty seven percent of them indicated they did not use Reference services. Of those who used the services, however, 67% reported they received good services. The Education Specialists reported a high usage rate (83%), although 40% of those who used the services gave a poor rating. But in rating their satisfaction with "Answers to Reference Questions", more Masters students appeared to use Reference services and were more satisfied compared to Education Specialists.

Out of the three service areas, Interlibrary Loan was the least used. Only 64% of the respondents indicated they used Interlibrary Loan while Circulation and Reference services were used by 79% and 82% of the respondents respectively. Even in a previous question where users were asked to rate their satisfaction with various library services, Interlibrary Loan featured among the five least used services.

As a service area, Interlibrary Loan was perceived positively by 60% of the respondents. Doctorate students (72%) were the most satisfied, while Masters students were the least satisfied, with 47% stating the quality of Interlibrary Loan services was poor.

Doctorate students were also the most satisfied with Circulation services. Of those who used this service, 67% rated the service as good. The perception of both the Masters and Education Specialists about Circulation was identical. About 40% and 60% in both groups rated the quality of service as poor and good services respectively.

Reference Staff

The Reference staff was rated on the following qualities: congeniality, enthusiasm in assisting, professional demeanor, knowledge of resources and services, and guidance in interpreting resources to users. For this question also "poor" and "fair" were combined and reported as "poor", and "good", "very good", and "excellent", were combined and reported as "good".

Overall, the Reference Staff was rated positively on all the five qualities (see Fig. 3). Congeniality of the staff and knowledge of resources and services received the highest approval, with 80% of the respondents reporting the staff was good in each quality. However, the enthusiasm of the staff was the lowest compared to all the other qualities, with 28% of the respondents rating the Reference staff as poor in this quality.

The Education Specialists were the most impressed with the efforts of the Reference staff, 85% said the staff was good, while 77% of the Doctorates and 74% of the Masters students rated the staff positively.

Does the Library Meet the Informational Needs of the Graduate Students?

The respondents were asked how they rated the library in meeting their informational needs. The response to this question revealed the Masters students were the most satisfied with library services, while the Education Specialists were the least satisfied. Forty one percent of the Masters students were satisfied that the library met their informational needs, compared 31% of the Doctorate students and 25% of the Education Specialists reported they were satisfied.

User Comments

One of the questions respondents were asked to give comments on was, "If you could change or add one thing in the library, what would it be?" Most of the respondents (37%) were concerned about the library hours. They wanted longer hours, especially on Friday evening and on weekends.

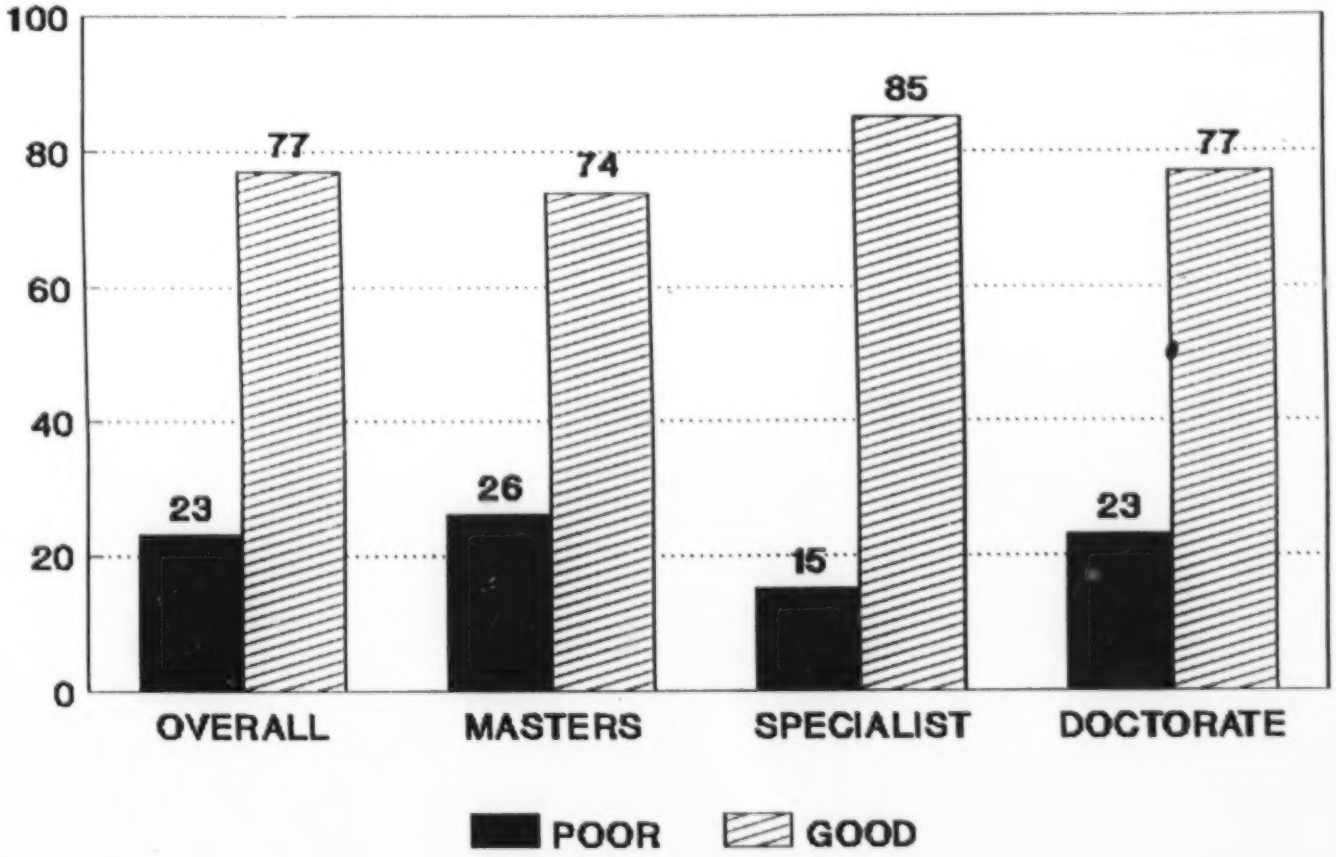
The respondents were also concerned about library materials. They wanted up-to-date books and journals, hard copy journals instead of microfilm, more periodicals, and access to the Black collection.

Another area of concern was the availability of computers. The respondents wanted more advanced technology, new computers, more computers with Internet, and for typing/word processing, and knowledge of electronic media resources.

Only a few respondents (10%) were concerned with the library staff. They commented that the library

Fig. 3

Reference Staff Qualities: User Perception



staff should be more professional and that more helpful. They suggested that staff development and training on being professional and assisting the students be provided.

Finally the respondents were asked, "What type of service(s) would you like your library-liaison to provide?" Here the responses included: "more computers for Internet, workshops for students, more specific up-to-date books and journals, be more considerate in talking and helping students, e-mail for every student, classes related to research, buy more periodicals/journals/more new books, make sure that materials needed are available, more friendliness shown to students; happy to assist students, friendly service, hours, more copy machines, and more and better change machines."

Discussion

The main purpose of this survey was to evaluate the effectiveness of the library's resources and services in meeting the needs of graduate students at South Carolina State University.

Graduate students, especially the Doctorate students, want better access to the library through longer open hours on weekends. This problem has already been addressed, and the library hours on Saturday have been changed. Instead of opening from 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. the library now opens from 11:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. on Saturday to accommodate students who attend classes on weekends and get out of class late.

Availability of materials, especially periodicals, is another concern for the students. When asked the reason why they were unable to find the materials they needed, most of the respondents selected "The Library Does Not Own". The Doctorate students seem to be most affected by this. This is not surprising because the library has had to cut subscription to quite a number of journals, and has not been able to purchase books for the collection due to lack of funds. (It is important to note here that many libraries have been faced with this problem and it is not just South Carolina State University[13]). This issue is being addressed by ensuring that students can request for materials not owned by the library through interlibrary loan. But usually, most students

want immediate access and interlibrary loan is considered a poor second choice.[14] This may be the reason why Interlibrary Loan, an important service, featured among the least used services.

Another important concern in this survey was availability of computers for typing/word-processing and access to the Internet. This has been addressed by opening a computer lab in the library, which provides access to the Internet and provides word-processing and other services.

One interesting observation from this survey is the popularity of print indexes. It is not known whether this popularity is due to lack of knowledge, experience, or discomfort with using the computerized indexes, or lack of enough terminals for access. Another survey would have to be conducted to effectively answer these questions.

Conclusion

Even though most of the students seem to be satisfied with the resources, and the quality of services provided, there is need for improvement. Up-to-date materials, availability of journals, improved technology for better access, and better customer service are areas that will need continuous improvement.

User education targeted to specific groups, and promotion for some databases and available services may also be necessary. For example, it is important to note that only 69% of the Education Specialists reported they used ERIC, a database in their area of specialization, compared to 100% of the Doctorate students who reported they used ERIC. In terms of services, users should be encouraged to utilize interlibrary loan when the materials they need are not available in the library.

Notes and References

1. South Carolina State University is one of the two land grant institutions in South Carolina, and the only predominantly African-American state-assisted institution in the state.

2. See Miller F. Whittaker Library: Library User Surveys, 1987 and 1993.

3. Minnie Johnson, "Miller F. Whittaker Library: Library User Survey, 1987," Miller F. Whittaker Library, South Carolina State University, Orangeburg, South Carolina.

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6. Elaine Brekke, comp. *User Surveys in ARL Libraries. SPEC Kit 205*. Washington, D.C. : Association of Research Libraries, Office of Management Services, 1994. ERIC, ED 376834.

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11. UCSD Libraries User Survey, found at <http://orpheus.ucsd.edu/survey/index.html>.

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14. Cheryl B. Truesdell, "Is Access a Viable Alternative to Ownership?" A Review of Access Performance," Journal of Academic Librarianship 29, no.4 (September 1994): 200-206.